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ABSTRACT

This paper presents preliminary findings from a doctoral research project investigating the preparation of teachers to teach ethnoculturally diverse student populations. Census data suggest that some 70 percent of North American teachers are white, female, middle class, and from suburban or small rural communities, while the majority of students are not. A two stage design was used for the study. Data were collected from 450 teachers working in three distinct sociogeographic environments in western Canada, including urban, rural, and isolated settings. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used in the study. During the first stage, a survey questionnaire was distributed to 150 teachers in each of the three settings. The second stage involved semi-structured interviews with a number of the respondents. Preliminary findings suggest that few of the recommendations in the literature concerning the preparation of effective teachers for ethnoculturally diverse student populations are being implemented. This is the case for both preservice and inservice programs. It is recommended that schools do not rely on preservice teacher education programs to prepare teachers for student diversity. Rather, schools must play a proactive role in developing and implementing orientation, induction, and other inservice practices which will facilitate teacher growth in this area. (Contains 31 references.) (Author/ND)

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The Preparation of Teachers for Ethnocultural Diversity

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I present the preliminary findings from my doctoral research. Census data suggest that some 70 per cent of North American teachers are white, female, middle class, and from suburban or small rural communities. The majority of students are not. Given this fact, the study sought to explore what steps, if any, are being taken to prepare teachers so that they might be successful educators of ethnoculturally diverse student populations.

A two stage design was used for the study. The data were collected from 450 teachers working in three distinct sociogeographic environments in western Canada, including urban, rural, and isolated settings. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used in the study. Data collected during the first stage, a survey questionnaire which was distributed to 150 teachers in each of the three settings, is reported upon here. The second stage involved semi-structured interviews with a number of the respondents and provided data which are currently under analysis.

Preliminary findings suggest that little of the reported literature concerning the preparation of effective teachers for ethnoculturally diverse schools is being implemented. This is the case for both preservice and inservice programs. The data suggest that teachers in western Canadian schools do teach ethnoculturally diverse student populations. It is recommended that schools do not rely on preservice teacher education programs to prepare teachers for that diversity. Rather, schools must play a proactive role in developing and implementing orientation, induction, and other inservice practices which will facilitate teacher growth.

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The Preparation of Teachers for Ethnocultural Diversity

The current focus on multicultural and minority education issues in North America has provided an impetus for educators to explore the preparation of effective teachers for ethnoculturally diverse student populations. Recent analyses of census data indicate that over 70% of current inservice and preservice teachers in both the United States and Canada are white, middle class, females from suburban communities or small rural towns (Banks, 1991; Grant & Secada, 1990; Lockhart, 1991). The majority of students, however, are neither white nor middle class, and demographic trends indicate that ethnocultural diversity will continue to be the dominant feature of contemporary classrooms (Avery & Walker, 1993; Ducharme & Ducharme, 1993).

Concurrently, the weak economic climate has resulted in lower teacher mobility. Established teachers tend to remain in their permanent positions and do not seek jobs elsewhere. This, in turn, leads to a shortage of positions for new teachers, especially in the suburban and rural communities from which those teachers tend to be drawn. The majority of available positions are to be found in either inner city environments with a high ethnoculturally diverse student population or else in isolated rural communities where an ethnoculturally homogeneous student population exhibits linguistic, cultural, and social patterns quite different from those of the new teacher. A recent study in California found that 69% of new teachers taught classes with students for whom English was a second language (Dianda, 1991), and other researchers have concluded that one third of American students belong to minority ethnocultural groups (Gonzalez, 1993; Tanner, 1993). In Canada, Moodley (1995) reports that 46% of students in Vancouver spoke English as a second language, as did 47% of students in Toronto (p. 802).

The issue arises, therefore, as to how teachers might best be prepared to be effective educators in ethnoculturally diverse classrooms. This preparation is not limited to preservice teacher education programs but also includes the support provided to beginning teachers during their early experiences in a new school. Although a number of teacher education programs are focussing on the preparation of teachers from ethnocultural minority groups, this is not in itself a solution to the problem. As Ogbu (1978), Philips (1993), and others have noted, the very act of immersion into an Anglo teacher education program is often enough to assimilate a minority person into the majority culture. Even if this were not the case, it is unlikely that minority candidates will be recruited into the profession quickly enough to provide a sufficient number of ethnoculturally compatible teachers (Dianda, 1991; Gonzalez, 1993). It therefore appears necessary that all teachers be prepared to be effective in a variety of ethnocultural settings.

Purpose

In this paper I present the preliminary findings for three aspects of a study which sought to describe and analyze the preparatory programs and initial teaching experiences of neophyte teachers in selected schools within two western Canadian provinces. First, I describe the extent to which ethnocultural diversity exists in the selected schools. Second, I identify the extent to which beginning teachers in those schools received an ethnocultural focus in their preservice education programs. And third, I examine whether teachers received supportive initial inservice experiences which served to prepare them to be effective teachers of ethnoculturally diverse student populations.

Theoretical Perspectives

Conceptually, this study was conducted within an ethnocultural framework. This framework includes both the formal and non-formal, or preservice and inservice, components of teacher education. As such it deals with the transitional period during which a teacher leaves student life and enters the profession.

That student learning occurs within the ethnocultural context of the child's home and community has been well established (e.g., Afele-Fa'amuli, 1992; Gayle, 1993; Tomlinson, 1983). However, not all homes or communities are similar, and neither are the teaching and learning strategies employed in those homes or communities. The need for teacher education programs to prepare preservice teachers for the realities of ethnoculturally diverse classrooms, with the associated diversity of student learning styles, has been thoroughly described (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 1990; Hall, 1993; Roth, 1992). Further, the notion that orientation and induction programs should provide the opportunity for beginning teachers to discover the ethnocultural idiosyncrasies of the community in which they are working has received support from a number of recent studies (e.g., Draper, Fraser, & Taylor, 1992; McCarty & Zepeda, 1992; Reynolds, 1992). In many instances it appears that practice does not reflect theoretical knowledge.

Avery and Walker (1993) have noted that "there is little evidence that the predominantly white teaching force is prepared at either the preservice or inservice level to meet the needs of today's students" (p. 27). I observed that this lack of preparation appeared to be particularly evident in schools with an ethnoculturally heterogeneous student population. I then hypothesized that ethnoculturally sensitive teacher education programs, when combined with initial teaching experiences where methods of teaching ethnoculturally diverse students were stressed, might result in a cadre of teachers who perceived themselves properly prepared to be effective teachers of ethnoculturally diverse students.

Research Design and Data Sources

The data were collected from teachers working in three distinct sociogeographic environments. These included urban, rural, and isolated settings. Following the suggestions of Cresswell (1994), de Landsheere (1988), and others, a combination of positivistic and anthropological approaches were used in the study, each serving to complement the other.

Research Design

A three stage research design was implemented for the study. Methods used were a survey questionnaire, structured interviews, and open-ended interviews. In this preliminary report, only the first stage has been implemented and reported upon.

Initial data collection was by means of a survey instrument. A questionnaire, based on a review of the pertinent literature, was designed by the researcher. Following peer and expert review, a draft copy of this instrument was piloted with a small group of teachers who represented the three sociogeographic regions previously described. Some alterations were subsequently made to the instrument, with four items being discarded and others reorganized. The final version of the instrument was then subjected to a second round of peer and expert review, printed, and mailed.

Permission to involve their teachers had been obtained from the various chief executive officers of a number of school systems. In First Nations communities, approval to involve teachers who were in the employ of the First Nation was also obtained from the Chief and Band Council. The CEO's forwarded a list of schools, together with the addresses of those schools and an indication of the number of teachers in each school. The study involved a total of 450 teachers, 150 from the schools in each of the three regions. The appropriate numbers of survey instruments were forwarded to the schools selected and the principals were asked to distribute the questionnaires. It was requested that they first give the surveys to any first year teachers in the school, and then progressively through the staff based on an ascending order of experience. A stamped postcard was included with each survey, so that respondents could indicate that they had returned the survey in the stamped addressed envelope which had been enclosed for that purpose. The responses were analyzed and inductive analysis of the responses to the open ended questions uncovered tentative categories for further exploration.

Data Sources

Three distinct sociogeographic regions were identified. Each region reflected a separate ethnocultural milieu. It was predicted that the dominant teacher-student relationships within each milieu would represent one of three possible ethnocultural combinations.

Region 1 consisted of a large urban centre. The school system in this centre serves an ethnoculturally diverse population from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The community tends to have a variable level of student transiency, with some schools experiencing much higher transiency rates than others. The dominant teacher-student relationship was predicted to feature ethnoculturally diverse student populations taught by teachers who were ethnoculturally incompatible with the majority of their students.

Region 2 consisted of two rural school districts in adjacent provinces. The school systems serve ethnoculturally diverse populations which tend to cluster in ethnoculturally congruent communities. The communities tend to have generally high socioeconomic backgrounds with a low level of student transiency. The dominant teacher-student relationship was predicted to feature ethnoculturally homogeneous student populations taught by teachers who were ethnoculturally compatible with the majority of their students.

Region 3 consisted of six isolated school districts. The school systems are controlled by First Nations governments and serve ethnoculturally homogeneous populations from predominantly low socioeconomic backgrounds. The communities tend to have a high level of student transiency. The dominant teacher-student relationship was predicted to feature ethnoculturally congruent student populations taught by teachers who were ethnoculturally incompatible with the majority of their students.

Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were collated and subjected to statistical analysis. Means and percentage frequency distributions were determined for each item. The responses to the questionnaire were then factor analyzed using two varimax rotations. The first analysis examined items related to the actual experiences of respondents in their preservice and inservice teacher education programs. The second analysis examined items related to the preferred experiences of respondents, those items which they believed should have been a significant part of their preservice and inservice teacher education programs.

The data were also examined through the use of one-way analyses of variance and two-tailed t-tests, to test for possible differences between and among groups at both the school and region levels. In view of the multiple constituencies involved in the study, the data were analyzed for each separate constituency and were then compared for similarities and

differences between constituency groups. Pearson product moment correlations were used to determine relationships between the different variables. Percentage frequency distributions were determined and the open-ended responses were content analyzed to determine categories for further investigation. For the purposes of this paper a critical value of $p<0.05$ was set to determine statistical significance, and all statistics except p values were truncated to two decimal places.

This paper reports the preliminary findings from the study. At the time of writing a total of 228 questionnaires, or 51% of the total distributed, had been returned. The actual breakdown of responses received is as shown in Table 1. The relatively high return rate from Region 1 allows for some optimism in the interpretation of data for that region. The interpretation of data for Regions 2 and 3 is much more tentative. In all cases, however, the findings must be considered as preliminary interpretations of data received to date.

Table 1

Breakdown of Responses Received and Reported On In This Paper

Region	Total Distributed	Total Returned To Date	Percentage Returned To Date
1	150	113	75.3
2	150	56	37.3
3	150	58	38.6
Not Stated	-	1	-
Total	450	228	50.6

Demographic Details of Respondents

The demographic data were drawn from responses to Part A of the questionnaire. There were 13 items in all. These items were related to the number of languages spoken by the teacher and by the students in the classroom; the age and gender of the teacher; the ethnocultural heterogeneity of the student body; whether the teacher considered himself or herself to be a member of an ethnocultural group similar to the majority of the students; the type of system in which the school was found; the size of the school; the geographic location of the school; the number of years a teacher has taught ; their years of teaching in

their present school; the location of the respondents initial preservice teacher education program; and, whether the respondent lives in the same community as the majority of the students they teach.

The review of related literature indicated that some 70% of the preservice and inservice teachers in North America are white, middle class, females who come from suburban or small rural communities (Banks, 1991; Grant & Secada, 1990; Lockhart, 1991). A similar percentage of respondents to this study (69.6%) were female, and 59.3% indicated that they were monolingual. Respondents were most often in the 30 to 39 years age range (36.8%), although over one quarter were also in each of the under 30 years (28.9%) and 40 to 49 years age range (25.9%) groups. The data show that the majority of respondents (60%) work in urban schools, compared with 28% who work in rural schools and 12% who work in isolated schools. The majority of these schools are of medium size and enrol between 151 and 450 students (61%), although the schools range in size from fewer than 150 to over 750 pupils.

The respondents received their preservice teacher education at universities across Canada and the United States. As might be expected from responses to a study conducted in those two provinces, the majority (76%) studied at the two major universities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Altogether, however, 27 different teacher education programs were represented in the responses.

Discussion of Preliminary Findings

In this section of the paper I present and discuss the preliminary findings of the study. First, I describe the extent to which ethnocultural diversity exists in the selected schools. Second, I identify the extent to which beginning teachers in those schools received an ethnocultural focus in their preservice education programs. And third, I examine whether teachers received supportive initial inservice experiences, such as orientation and induction practices, which served to prepare them to be effective teachers of ethnoculturally diverse student populations.

Ethnocultural Diversity in Schools

There exists a limited literature describing the ethnocultural diversity found in Canadian schools. Although many are quick to comment that the population at large is rapidly becoming more diverse, empirical data on which to base this assertion is lacking. The issue was addressed through four items on the questionnaire.

One item asked respondents to describe the students whom they taught, and to indicate

whether the majority of students in their classes were ethnoculturally homogeneous or ethnoculturally heterogeneous. Almost half of the teachers (43%) described the students whom they taught as being ethnoculturally diverse although a majority (57%) indicated that their students were a culturally homogeneous group.

A second item sought information on the number of languages spoken by students taught by the respondents. The majority of respondents (63%) claimed they taught students who were either monolingual or bilingual. The remaining two fifths of the respondents indicated that they taught students who spoke three or more languages. These data indicate that a sizable minority, or 31% of the respondents, taught linguistically diverse groups of students.

In contrast, the data show that the majority of teachers (59%) were monolingual. Less than one third (31%) were bilingual and only 22 of the respondents, or 10%, indicated an ability to speak three or more languages. None of the teachers could speak more than four languages, and fewer than two thirds (63%) of the respondents indicated that they were of an ethnocultural group similar to the majority of the students whom they taught.

The ethnocultural diversity which exists within these selected western Canadian schools is quite extensive, although not as pronounced as that found within Californian schools discussed in other studies (e.g., Dianda, 1991; Gonzalez, 1993). Generally, the isolated schools in western Canada tend to have ethnoculturally homogeneous populations whereas both the urban and rural schools show a broader range of ethnocultural diversity.

In region 1 schools, located within a large urban centre, the dominant teacher-student relationship was not quite as predicted. Although respondents indicated that these schools featured ethnoculturally heterogeneous student populations, they also noted that the teachers were ethnoculturally compatible with the majority of their students. It was in these schools that the majority of multilingual students were found. It appears that the urban schools discussed in the study have predominantly Anglo student populations with a strong, but minority, representation of many other ethnocultural groups.

In region 2 schools, located within two rural school districts in adjacent provinces, the dominant teacher-student relationship was not as predicted. There was a much wider range of ethnocultural diversity than anticipated, with classes taught by teachers who were not ethnoculturally compatible with the majority of their students.

In the isolated schools which were located in region 3, the dominant teacher-student relationship was as predicted. The ethnoculturally congruent student populations which are found on First Nations reserves and in other small, isolated communities were taught by teachers who were ethnoculturally incompatible with the majority of their students.

Ethnocultural Focus in Preservice Education

The study also sought to identify the extent to which beginning teachers in the selected schools received preservice education programs which served to prepare them to be effective teachers of ethnoculturally diverse student populations, where these exist. The responses were analyzed to determine whether respondents believed that their preservice programs had included an ethnocultural emphasis. Respondents generally indicated that they had not received such an emphasis in their programs.

The data show that less than one third of respondents actually received an ethnocultural focus in their preservice teacher education. More than two thirds, and often more than three quarters, of respondents believed that they should have received such a focus in their preservice teacher education. Respondents emphatically indicated (83%) that their preservice teacher education programs did not include courses which attempted to provide them with the skills necessary to analyze and adapt curricula so that ethnocultural relevance and applicability were reflected in those curricula. In contrast, 75% of the respondents believed that such courses should have been part of their preservice teacher education program.

Respondents also indicated that their courses did not provide them with an understanding of a variety of ethnocultural teaching (81%) or learning (78%) styles, nor attempted to explain different theories of ethnocultural minority student learning or achievement (77%). In contrast, 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such courses should be compulsory for all teachers.

Respondents were most supportive (75%) of the notion that it is appropriate that preservice teachers receive specialized knowledge of ethnocultural diversity. They were least supportive (67%) of making compulsory those courses which sought to provide students with an understanding of the history, culture, and philosophy of First Nations.

Ethnocultural Focus in Inservice Education

Third, the study sought to identify the extent to which beginning teachers in the selected schools received supportive initial inservice experiences which served to prepare them to be effective teachers of ethnoculturally diverse student populations, where these exist. The responses were analyzed to determine whether respondents believed that their preservice programs had included an ethnocultural emphasis. Respondents generally indicated that they had not received such an emphasis in their programs. As shown by the data presented in Table 2, very few respondents received ethnocultural information about their school or community from the job advertisement to which they responded. Indeed, 82% of the

respondents reported that they received no such information, although only 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed that such information should be provided.

Table 2

A Comparison Between the Ethnocultural Information and Planned Orientation Received by New Teachers and That Which They Believe They Should Have Received

	I Was Given % Yes	I Should be Given % A/SA
Specific Ethnocultural Information re. School & Community	17.8	66.4
Planned Period of Orientation	28.1	84.8

Further, 85 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a planned period of orientation to the school and community should be provided to new teachers. In their experience, however, only 28% had received such an orientation. Indeed, as shown in the data presented in Table 3, respondents reported a positive experience in only one of six items related to inservice education.

Slightly more than one half of the respondents, or 52%, indicated that they had been given opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. In contrast, 94% of the respondents believed that new teachers should be given such opportunities. One fifth of the respondents indicated that, as new teachers, they had received opportunities to observe more experienced teachers. This compared with 92% who believed that new teachers should be given these opportunities. Similarly, 20% of respondents indicated that they had been given the opportunity to choose a "buddy" who would act as a mentor during the first year, whereas 92% believed that beginning teachers should have been provided with such an opportunity.

A higher proportion (39%) of respondents indicated that they had been provided with special workshops or inservice sessions during their first year, while 84% believed that these programs should be available to all new teachers. Although 95% had not received, as

Table 3

A Comparison Between the Supportive Inservice Experiences Received by New Teachers and Those Which They Believe They Should Have Received

	I Was Given % Yes	I Should Be Given % A SA
Opportunities for Collegial Collaboration	51.6	94.2
Special Workshops & Inservice Sessions	39.2	83.5
Opportunity to Choose a Mentor	19.5	91.5
Opportunities to Observe Experienced Teachers	19.5	92.4
Additional resources	9.5	46.5
Extra Planning Time	5.0	50.5

new teachers, extra planning time beyond that available to all staff, only a slight majority (51%) agreed or strongly agreed that this should be provided to new teachers. This was an unexpected finding, as 57% had responded to an earlier item on the questionnaire by stating that, in their first year of teaching, they had experienced insufficient time for lesson planning. Further, although 10% had received additional resources during their first year of teaching, only 47% believed that new teachers generally should be given such additional support.

Implications and Conclusion

The paper reports on areas which have been identified, in the literature, as being of concern to both teachers and teacher educators. There have been few Canadian attempts to provide empirical support for these areas of concern. In examining the ethnocultural preparation of teachers within the sociocultural context of contemporary schools the study is contributing to knowledge in this field.

One contribution of this study to the research is by providing an indication of the actual ethnocultural diversity to be found among the student population in western Canada. Although some studies (e.g., Banks, 1995; Grossman, 1991; Leake, 1993) have discussed cultural heterogeneity in American schools, there have been few attempts to produce Canadian data. Such data are important if teachers are to be effectively prepared for the cultural diversity which is presumed to exist. In this study, 37% of the respondents indicated that they teach in linguistically diverse classrooms. In addition, almost half of the respondents in this study indicated that they teach an ethnoculturally diverse group of students, and a further 37% indicated that they teach an ethnoculturally homogeneous group of students who are ethnoculturally different from themselves. It would therefore appear that there is a need for neophyte teachers to be provided with an ethnocultural focus in both their preservice and inservice programs.

The data related to the actual preservice and inservice experiences of respondents indicate that they have not encountered such a focus. The majority of the respondents received a preservice education program which they believed did not adequately prepare them for the challenges of teaching in the ethnoculturally diverse classrooms of contemporary Canadian schools. On obtaining a position, they then experienced many of the problems faced by beginning teachers elsewhere. In addition, respondents did not find policies in place which addressed ethnocultural diversity at the school level, were not provided with additional opportunities or supplies beyond those received by their experienced and established colleagues. They rarely believed that they had the skills and expertise necessary to enable them to address the ethnocultural diversity they found in their own classrooms. The four factors related to the preferred preservice and inservice experiences of respondents indicate that the respondents were aware of these shortcomings. Further, they expressed a strong desire for such issues to be addressed.

It is accepted that preservice teacher education programs can not fully prepare neophyte teachers for the variety of ethnocultural settings they will experience. Such programs can, however, play a role in providing education students with a general knowledge of ethnocultural diversity, with a basic understanding of sociolinguistic development patterns, and with the ability to accept ethnocultural difference as a strength rather than as a cause for concern. At the school level, it is important that an awareness and understanding of the specific ethnocultural milieu of the community be provided to new teachers. Schools could address this issue by providing greater detail in position vacancy advertisements and by exploring ethnocultural compatibility during the interview. A planned period of orientation for new teachers would be most useful, as would an ongoing sequence of induction and

inservice programs. It appears that although educators are aware of the realities experienced by beginning teachers in contemporary classrooms, this awareness has not been translated into an action plan which focuses at overcoming these negative situations.

This study explores the relationship which exists between the preparation of teachers and the realities they experience when they embark on their careers. It does so from a new perspective, and makes a contribution to the knowledge base by seeking to determine which of those strategies that have been reported in the literature as proving effective with ethnoculturally varied student populations are actually part of the preparation or practice of teachers. The findings may have implications for the structure of teacher education programs and for the recruitment and initiation of beginning teachers, implications which may be of value not only in North America but also in other countries which are experiencing similar situations.

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